

United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

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To: Field Managers, Nevada
Field Managers, Eagle Lake and Surprise Field Offices, California

From: Deputy State Director, Natural Resources, Lands & Planning

Subject: Nevada Wilderness Study Area Boundaries

In the past year, several situations have occurred at the Field Office level which have raised questions relating to Wilderness Study Area (WSA) boundaries. The purpose of this Instruction Memorandum is to reiterate and clarify the Bureau's policy regarding WSA boundaries.

Nevada's WSA boundary decisions were approved by the State Director on November 15, 1980 and became final on December 14, 1980. Nevada's recommendations for "suitable" and "non-suitable" (i.e., "wilderness" and "non-wilderness") boundaries were approved in a Record of Decision signed by the Secretary of the Interior on October 18, 1991. From the time the State Director approved WSA boundaries, and from the time the Secretary of the Interior approved BLM's recommendations for "suitable" and "non-suitable" boundaries, it has been Bureau policy that WSA, "suitable" and "non-suitable" boundaries may not be altered, modified, adjusted or otherwise changed in any manner or for any reason until Congress either designates these areas as wilderness or releases them for other uses. We have rigidly adhered to this policy over the years even though numerous inventory, study, reporting and cartographic errors have been discovered and reported to the State Office.

Chapter III A.1. of the Interim Management Policy (IMP) for Lands Under Wilderness Review states that with the exception of some titling actions, lands within WSA boundaries can not be disposed of through any means. However, private and non-Federal lands within WSA boundaries may be acquired through land exchange for public lands outside WSA boundaries. Without exception, we have upheld this policy in Nevada.

Official WSA, “suitable” and “non-suitable” boundaries are those lines drawn on our Nevada State Office master set of 7.5 minute (1:24,000) U.S. Geological Survey quadrangle maps. These boundaries coincide with the WSA boundary decisions approved by the State Director in 1980 and the “suitable” and “non-suitable” boundary decisions approved by the Secretary in 1991. Some years ago, we digitized and verified the WSA, “suitable” and “non-suitable” boundary lines drawn on the official maps and entered these digitized coordinates in our Geographic Information System (GIS) database.

A question often asked in Nevada is, “Where is the official WSA boundary along a WSA boundary road?” The answer is, “In situations where a WSA boundary road is present, the official WSA boundary is the inside edge-of-disturbance of the boundary road or the border line of the legal right-of-way granted for construction of the road.”

Boundaries are described and annotated on the official set of 7.5 minute maps where the boundary follows natural or manmade features, contours, a straight line from point to point, or along sectionalized lines of the rectangular system of surveys. In these cases, the description **is** the official boundary.

Offset distances from the center lines of WSA boundary roads described and annotated on the official set of 7.5 minute maps are **not** WSA boundaries. Rather, they are recommended Wilderness boundaries proposed to Congressional committees with consideration given to the potential for future expansion and maintenance of existing boundary roads, and rights-of-way. A note to this effect is found at the bottom of each official map.

If no boundary road, section or patent line, description or annotation exists, the official WSA boundary is the center line of the weighted boundary line drawn on the 7.5 minute quadrangle map. The digitized coordinates of the weighted line as recorded in the GIS database must be used to locate and post the line on the ground. Cadastral Survey should be contacted in these cases to coordinate proper utilization of the coordinates, especially when using Geographic Positioning System applications. Send requests for such assistance to the State Director (NV-952).

A “cherry-stemmed” road is a road that is completely enclosed on both sides by a WSA boundary. The official WSA boundary for a “cherry-stemmed” road is the border of the legal right-of-way, if a right-of-way has been granted, or the edge-of-disturbance if no right-of-way has been issued. Any existing activity, whether authorized or unauthorized, or any proposed activity outside the edge-of-disturbance of a “cherry-stemmed” road or outside the border of the legal right-of-way is **within** the WSA. These activities must be treated as an authorized activity or use, an IMP violation, or as a proposed action within the WSA.

It is recognized that boundary lines drawn on our “official” 7.5 minute quadrangle maps many years ago may not ultimately be the best on-the-ground choice for a manageable, easily recognizable, “visitor friendly,” wilderness boundary. However, at this time, Bureau policy precludes us from modifying our WSA, “suitable” and “non-suitable” boundaries.

We can, nevertheless, document potential adjustments to boundaries based on: 1) discovery of inventory, study, reporting, and cartographic errors, 2) reconsideration of administrative manageability, 3) feasibility, efficiency, and effectiveness of cadastral survey, and 4) changes in resource conditions or in land status. Refer to Instruction Memorandum No. NV-98-050 dated September 21, 1998 for procedures. We can keep these proposed boundary modifications on file until such time as a Nevada wilderness bill is introduced in Congress. At that point in the political and legislative process, the Nevada BLM will be asked by various Congressional committees and members of Congress for our opinions and recommendations relating to designated wilderness boundaries.

After a Nevada wilderness bill is passed, we will have another opportunity to make minor modifications and adjustments to designated boundaries when we submit our official legal descriptions and maps to Congressional subcommittees.

If you have questions regarding WSA boundaries, please contact Steve Smith in the State Office at (775) 861-6477.

Signed By;
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